
AN
ODE
ON THE
POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS
OF THE
HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND.

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CONSIDERED AS
THE SUBJECT OF POETRY.

INSCRIBED TO Mr. HOME, AUTHOR OF *Douglas*.

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By Mr. WILLIAM COLLINS, Author of the *Ode on the Passions*, &c.

The Second Edition.

DEDICATED TO THE WARTONS.

"Mr. COLLINS, shewed (the WARTONS) in his last illness, an ODE, inscribed to Mr. JOHN HOME, on
"the Superstitions of the Highlands, which they thought superior to his other Works, but which no search
"has yet found."

Dr. JOHNSON'S LIFE OF COLLINS.

LONDON:

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ODE

ON THE

POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS

OF THE

HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND:

WITH

THE SUBJECT OF POETRY

BY MR. JAMES H. BROWN, A. M.

BY MR. WILLIAM COLLINS, Author of the Ode on the Poets, &c.

THE UNIVERSITY OF

EDINBURGH

PRINTED BY

DEDICATED TO THE WATSONS

Mr. Collins, whose (as Watson) is in the name, is one of the most famous of the Scottish poets, and his Ode on the Poets, &c. is a masterpiece of the kind. The subject of the Ode is the Poets, and the Ode is a masterpiece of the kind. The subject of the Ode is the Poets, and the Ode is a masterpiece of the kind.



PREFACE.

BY THE EDITOR.

A GENTLEMAN who, for the present, chooses not to publish his name, discovered last summer the following admirable Ode, among some old papers, in the concealed drawers of a bureau, left him, among other articles, by a relation.

The title struck him. The perusal delighted him. He communicated his valuable discovery to some literary friends, who advised him to publish it the ensuing winter.

Mr. Collins, it would appear, by his great intimacy with *Mr. Home*, and his well-known predilection for *Spenser* and *Tasso*, made himself a master in the marvellous that characterized the rude ages. No wonder, then, that he paints the superstitious notions of the North so picturesquely poetical!

By the public prints we are informed, that a *Scotch* clergyman lately discovered *Collins's* rude draught of this poem. It is however said to be very imperfect. The Vth stanza, and the half of the VIth, say the prints, being deficient, has been supplied by *Mr. Mackenzie*. It has been published in some of these diurnal papers; and is here annexed, as a note, for the purpose of comparison, and to do justice to the elegant author of *the Man of Feeling*. It is undoubtedly pretty; but wants all the wild boldness of the original, which is certainly one of the most Beautiful poems in the English language.

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TO THE WARTONS.

GENTLEMEN,

THE following POEM, being the long-lost treasure of your favourite COLLINS, is apology sufficient for dedicating it to you.

Your mentioning it to Dr. JOHNSON, as it was the means that led to the imperfect first draught, so it likewise was the happy means of bringing this PERFECT copy to light.

If the smallest poetic gem be admired by you, how much more must you exult, on being put in possession of the brightest jewel, according to your own opinions, of your dear departed friend? The world will no doubt, in this, soon join issue with you both, whose talents do honour to your country.

GENTLEMEN,

I am, with great regard,

Your Literary Admirer,

THE EDITOR.

TO THE WARTONS.

GENTLEMEN,

THE following Poem, being the long-lost treasure of your favourite
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Your mentioning it to Dr. Johnson, as it was the means that led to the
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SUBJECT OF POETRY.

INSCRIBED TO *Mr. JOHN HOME.*

HOME, thou return'st from *Thames*, whose Naiads long
Have seen thee ling'ring with a fond delay,
Mid those soft friends, whose hearts some future day,
Shall melt, perhaps, to hear thy tragic song*.
Go, not unmindful of that cordial youth†
Whom, long endear'd thou leav'st by *Lavant's* side;

* How truly did *Collins* predict *Home's* tragic powers!

† A Gentleman of the name of *Barrow*, who introduced *Home* to *Collins*.

Together let us wish him lasting truth,
And joy untainted with his destin'd bride.
Go ! nor regardless, while these numbers boast
My short-liv'd bliss, forget my social name ;
But think, far off, how, on the Southern coast,
I met thy friendship with an equal flame !
Fresh to that soil thou turn'st, where ev'ry vale
Shall prompt the poet, and his song demand :
To thee thy copious subjects ne'er shall fail ;
Thou need'st but take thy pencil to thy hand,
And paint what all believe, who own thy genial land.

II.

There, must thou wake perforce thy *Doric* quill ;
'Tis Fancy's land to which thou sett'st thy feet ;
Where still, 'tis said, the Fairy people meet,
Beneath each birken shade, on mead or hill.
There, each trim lass, that skims the milky store
To the swart tribes, their creamy bowls allots ;
By night they sip it round the cottage-door,
While airy minstrels warble jocund notes.

There, ev'ry herd, by sad experience, knows
How, wing'd with Fate, their elf-shot arrows fly,
When the sick ewe her summer food foregoes,
Or, stretch'd on earth, the heart-smit heifers lie.
Such airy beings awe th' untutor'd swain :
Nor thou, tho' learn'd, his homelier thoughts neglect ;
Let thy sweet Muse the rural faith sustain ;
These are the themes of simple, sure effect,
That add new conquests to her boundless reign,
And fill, with double force, her heart-commanding strain.

III.

Ev'n yet preserv'd, how often may'st thou hear,
Where to the pole the *Boreal* mountains run,
Taught by the father, to his list'ning son ;
Strange lays, whose pow'r had charm'd a *Spenser's* ear.
At ev'ry pause, before thy mind possest,
Old *Runic* bards shall seem to rise around,
With uncouth lyres, in many-colour'd vest,
Their matted hair with boughs fantastic crown'd :

Whether thou bid'st the well-taught hind repeat
The choral dirge, that mourns some chieftain brave,
When ev'ry shrieking maid her bosom beat,
And strew'd with choicest herbs his scented grave ;
Or whether, sitting in the shepherd's shiel*,
Thou hear'st some sounding tale of war's alarms ;
When at the bugle's call, with fire and steel,
The sturdy clans pour'd forth their brawny swarms,
And hostile brothers met, to prove each others arms.

IV.

'Tis thine to sing, how, framing hideous spells,
In *Sky's* lone isle, the gifted wizard-seer,
Lodg'd in the wintry cave with Fate's fell spear ;
Or in the depth of *Uist's* dark forest dwells :
How they, whose sight such dreary dreams engross,
With their own vision oft astonish'd droop,
When, o'er the watry strath, or quaggy moss,
They see the gliding ghosts unbodied troop.

* A summer hut, built in the high part of the mountains, to tend their flocks in the warm season, when the pasture is fine.

OR, if in sports, or on the festive green,
Their destin'd glance some fated youth descrie,
Who now, perhaps, in lusty vigour seen,
And rosy health, shall soon lamented die.
For them the viewless forms of air obey;
Their bidding heed, and at their beck repair.
They know what spirit brews the stormful day,
And heartless, oft like moody madness, stare
To see the phantom train their secret work prepare.

V.

To monarchs dear *, some hundred miles astray,
Oft have they seen Fate give the fatal blow!
The Seer, in *Sky*, shriek'd as the blood did flow,
When headless *Charles* warm on the scaffold lay!

* These are the lines, within inverted commas, which were substituted by *Mr. Mackenzie*, in place of the lost leaf in the Scotch imperfect MS.

“ Or on some bellying rock that shades the deep,
“ They view the lurid signs that cross the sky,
“ Where in the west, the brooding tempests lie;
“ And hear their first, faint, rustling pennons sweep.

As *Boreas* threw his young *Aurora** forth,
 In the first year of the first *George's* reign,
 And battles rag'd in welkin of the North,
 They mourn'd in air, fell, fell Rebellion, slain !

" Or in the arched cave, where deep and dark
 " The broad, unbroken billows heave and swell,
 " In horrid musings rapt, they sit to mark
 " The lab'ring moon ; or list the nightly yell
 " Of that dread spirit, whose gigantic form
 " The seer's entranced eye can well survey,
 " Through the dim air who guides the driving storm,
 " And points the wretched bark its destin'd prey.
 " Or him who hovers on his flagging wing,
 " O'er the dire whirlpool, that, in ocean's waste,
 " Draws instant down whate'er devoted thing
 " The falling breeze within its reach hath plac'd—
 " The distant seaman hears, and flies with trembling haste.
 " Or, if on land the fiend exerts his sway,
 " Silent he broods o'er quicksand, bog or fen,
 " Far from the shelt'ring roof and haunts of men,
 " When witch'd darkness shuts the eye of day,
 " And shrouds each star that wont to cheer the night ;
 " Or, if the drifted snow perplex the way,
 " With treach'rous gleam he lures the fated wight,
 " And leads him flound'ring on and quite astray."

* By young *Aurora*, *Collins* undoubtedly meant the first appearance of the northern lights, which happened about the year 1715; at least, it is most highly probable from this peculiar circumstance, that no ancient writer whatever has taken any notice of them, nor even any one modern, previous to the above period.

And as, of late, they joy'd in *Preston's* fight,

Saw at sad *Falkirk*, all their hopes near crown'd !

They rav'd ! divining, thro' their *Second Sight* *,

Pale, red *Culloden*, where these hopes were drown'd !

Illustrious *William* † ! *Britain's* guardian name !

One *William* sav'd us from a tyrant's stroke ;

He, for a sceptre, gain'd heroic fame,

But thou, more glorious, Slavery's chain hast broke,

To reign a private man, and bow to Freedom's yoke !

VI.

These, too, thou'lt sing ! for well thy magic Muse

Can to the top-most heav'n of grandeur soar !

Or stoop to wail the swain that is no more !

Ah, homely swains ! your homeward steps ne'er loose ;

Let not dank *Will* ‡ mislead you to the heath :

Dancing in mirky night, o'er fen and lake,

* *Second sight* is the term that is used for the divination of the *Highlanders*.

† The late *Duke of Cumberland*, who defeated the *Pretender* at the battle of *Culloden*.

‡ A fiery meteor, called by various names, such as *Will with the Wisp*, *Jack with the Lanthorn*, &c. It hovers in the air over marshy and fenny places.

He glows, to draw you downward to your death,
In his bewitch'd, low, marshy, willow brake !
What though far off, from some dark dell espied,
His glimm'ring mazes cheer th' excursive sight,
Yet turn, ye wand'ers, turn your steps aside,
Nor trust the guidance of that faithless light ;
For watchful, lurking, 'mid th' unrustling reed,
At those mirk hours the wily monster lies,
And listens oft to hear the passing steed,
And frequent round him rolls his sullen eyes,
If chance his savage wrath may some weak wretch surprise.

VII.

Ah, luckless swain, o'er all unblest, indeed !
Whom late bewilder'd in the dank, dark fen,
Far from his flocks, and smoaking hamlet, then !
To that sad spot were hums the sedgy weed :
On him, enrag'd, the fiend, in angry mood,
Shall never look with pity's kind concern,
But instant, furious, raise the whelming flood
O'er its drown'd banks, forbidding all return !

Or, if he meditate his wish'd escape,
To some dim hill that seems uprising near,
To his faint eye, the grim and grisly shape,
In all its terrors clad, shall wild appear.
Meantime the watry surge shall round him rise,
Pour'd sudden forth from ev'ry swelling source !
What now remains but tears and hopeless sighs ?
His fear-shook limbs have lost their youthly force,
And down the waves he floats, a pale and breathless corse !

VIII.

For him in vain his anxious wife shall wait,
Or wander forth to meet him on his way ;
For him in vain at to-fall of the day,
His babes shall linger at th' unclosing gate !
Ah, ne'er shall he return ! Alone, if night,
Her travell'd limbs in broken slumbers steep !
With drooping willows drest, his mournful sprite
Shall visit sad, perchance, her silent sleep :
Then he, perhaps, with moist and watry hand,

Shall fondly seem to press her shudd'ring cheek,
 And with his blue-swoln face before her stand,
 And, shiv'ring cold, these piteous accents speak :
 " Pursue, dear wife, thy daily toils, pursue,
 " At dawn or dusk, industrious as before ;
 " Nor e'er of me one helpless thought renew,
 " While I lie welt'ring on the ozier'd shore,
 " Drown'd by the *Kelpie's** wrath, nor e'er shall aid thee more !"

IX.

Unbounded is thy range ; with varied skill
 Thy Muse may, like those feath'ry tribes which spring
 From their rude rocks, extend her skirting wing
 Round the moist marge of each cold Hebrid isle,
 To that hoar pile † which still its ruin shows :
 In whose small vaults a pigmy-folk is found,
 Whose bones the delver with his spade upthrows,

* The water fiend.

† One of the Hebrides is called *The Isle of Pigmies*, where it is reported, that several miniature bones of the human species have been dug up in the ruins of a chapel there.

And culls them, wond'ring, from the hallow'd ground !

Or thither *, where beneath the show'ry west,

The mighty kings of three fair realms are laid :

Once foes, perhaps, together now they rest,

No slaves revere them, and no wars invade :

Yet frequent now, at midnight solemn hour,

The rifted mounds their yawning cells unfold,

And forth the Monarchs stalk with sov'reign pow'r,

In pageant robes ; and, wreath'd with sheeny gold,

And on their twilight tombs aerial council hold.

X.

But, oh, o'er all, forget not *Kilda's* race,

On whose bleak rocks, which brave the wasting tides,

Fair Nature's daughter, Virtue, yet abides.

Go ! just, as they, their blameless manners trace !

Then to my ear transmit some gentle song,

Of those whose lives are yet sincere and plain,

* Icolmkill, one of the Hebrides, where near sixty of the ancient Scottish, Irish, and Norwegian kings are interred.

Their bounded walks the rugged cliffs along,
 And all their prospect but the wintry main.
 With sparing temp'rance at the needful time,
 They drain the scented spring ; or, hunger-prest,
 Along th' *Atlantic* rock, undreading, climb,
 And of its eggs despoil the *Solan's* * nest.
 Thus, blest in primal innocence they live,
 Suffic'd, and happy with that frugal fare
 Which tasteful toil and hourly danger give.
 Hard is their shallow soil, and bleak and bare ;
 Nor ever vernal bee was heard to murmur there !

XI.

Nor need'st thou blush that such false themes engage
 Thy gentle mind, of fairer stores possesst ;
 For not alone they touch the village breast,
 But fill'd in elder time, th' historic page.
 There, *Shakspeare's* self, with ev'ry garland crown'd,

* An aquatic bird like a goose, on the eggs of which the inhabitants of St. Kilda, another of the Hebrides, chiefly subsist.

Flew to those fairy climes his fancy sheen,

In musing hour ; his wayward sisters found,
And with their terrors drest the magic scene.

From them he sung, when, 'mid his bold design,
Before the *Scot*, afflicted, and aghast !

The shadowy kings of *Banquo's* fated line,
Thro' the dark cave in gleamy pageant past.

Proceed ! nor quit the tales which, simply told,
Could once so well my answ'ring bosom pierce ;

Proceed, in forceful sounds, and colour bold,
The native legends of thy land rehearse ;
To such adapt thy lyre, and suit thy pow'rful verse.

XII.

In scenes like these, which, daring to depart

From sober truth, are still to Nature true,
And call forth fresh delight to Fancy's view

Th' heroic Muse employ'd her *Tasso's* art !

How have I trembl'd, when, at *Tancred's* stroke,
Its gushing blood the gaping cypress pour'd !

When each live plant with mortal accents spoke,
And the wild blast upheav'd the vanish'd sword !

How have I sat, when pip'd the pensive wind,
To hear his harp by British *Fairfax* strung !

Prevailing poet ! whose undoubting mind,
Believ'd the magic wonders which he sung !

Hence, at each sound, imagination glows !
Hence, at each picture, vivid life starts here !

Hence his warm lay with softest sweetness flows !
Melting it flows, pure, murm'ring, strong and clear,
And fills th' impassion'd heart, and wins th' harmonious ear !

XIII.

All hail, ye scenes that o'er my soul prevail !

Ye splendid friths and lakes, which, far away,
Are by smooth *Annan** fill'd, or past'ral *Tay* †,
Or *Don*'s ‡ romantic springs, at distance, hail !
The time shall come, when I, perhaps, may tread

* † ‡ Three rivers in *Scotland*.

Your lowly glens *, o'erhung with spreading broom ;
 Or o'er your stretching heaths, by Fancy led ;
 Or o'er your mountains creep, in awful gloom !
 Then will I dress once more the faded bow'r,
 Where *Jonson* † sat in *Drummond's* classic shade ;
 Or crop, from *Tiviotdale*, each lyric flow'r,
 And mourn, on *Tarrow's* banks, where *Willy's* laid !
 Meantime, ye pow'rs that on the plains which bore
 The cordial youth, on *Lothian's* plains ‡, attend !---
 Where'er HOME dwells, on hill, or lowly moor,
 To him I loose, your kind protection lend,
 And, touch'd with love like mine, preserve my absent friend !

11 7 49

* Vallies.

† *Ben Jonson* paid a visit on foot, in 1619, to the Scotch poet *Drummond*, at his seat of *Hawthornden*, within four miles of *Edinburgh*.

‡ *Barrow*, it seems, was at the *Edinburgh* university, which is in the county of *Lothian*.

FINIS.

